

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6904

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BUENOS AIRES 5672

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM, PINT, AR

SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS: VOICES OF CONCERN BEGINNING TO BE HEARD

REF: (A) BUENOS AIRES 5637 (B) BUENOS AIRES 5521

1. WE ARE BEGINNING TO SEE AN INCREASING OUTSPOKENNESS ON POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND HUMAN RIGHT SITUATION FROM LIBERAL AND MODERATE POLITICAL CIRCLES, THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, AND ELEMENTS OF THE PRESS. IT IS CAUTIOUS, EXPRESSED OFTEN IN EUPHEMISTIC TERMS, AND BY NO MEANS CONSTITUTES ANY GREAT UPSURGE OF REPUDIATION OF THE PRESENT GOA OR ITS LEADERS, BUT IT IS A QUALITATIVE CHANGE FROM THE SITUATION PREVAILING FROM THE MARCH COUP TO ONLY RECENTLY.

2. SOME OF THIS EVIDENCE OF GROWING CONCERN IS COMING TO US IN INDIVIDUAL CONTACTS WITH A CONSIDERABLE RANGE OF REPRESENTATIVE POLITICAL FIGURES, CHURCHMEN, JOURNALISTS, AND EVEN SOME CIVILIAN CAREER OFFICIALS IN THE GOA. MOST OF THESE INDIVIDUALS WERE CONTENT TO SEE THE MILITARY TAKEOVER ON MARCH 24. THEY BELIEVED PRESIDENT VIDELA'S PROMISES TO CONTROL THE VIOLENCE AND RESPECT HUMAN RIGHTS, AND WERE PREPARED TO TURN A BLIND EYE FOR AN APPROPRIATE PERIOD TO EXTRALEGAL AND EXTRA-OFFICIAL EFFORTS TO ELIMINATE THE OPEN AND RECOGNIZED TERRORISM, CONFIDENTIAL

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FROM THE EXTREME LEFT. THEY DID NOT LIKE THE COUNTER-TERRORISM,

BUT AS LONG AS IT WAS CONFINED TO ATTACKS ON THOSE WHO IT WAS REASONABLY CLEAR WERE DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN THE GUERRILLA STRUGGLE, THEY REMAINED SILENT. THEY WERE ALSO PREPARED TO ACCEPT THE TEMPORARY NECESSITY TO HOLD, UNDER STATE OF SIEGE PROVISIONS, MEMBERS OF THE FORMER GOVERNMENTN POLITICAL LEADERS, LABOR LEADERS, ETC., IN THE EXPECTATION THAT THESE WOULD EITHER BE CHARGED OR RELEASED AFTER A SHORT TIME. AND, AFTER ALL, IT WAS GENERALLY NOT THEIR OX WHICH WAS BEING GORED.

3. THREE DEVELOPMENTS HAVE CHANGED SITUATION. FIRST IS SIMPLE QUESTION OF TIME--IT IS NOW OVER FIVE MONTHS SINCE THE COUP AND THE GOA HAS TILL NOT ACCOUNTED FOR ITS STATE OF SIEGE PRISONERS BY EVEN LISTING THEM, HAS CONTINUED TO SUPPRESS POLITICAL PARTY AND LABOR UNION ACTIVITIES, ET. DETENTIONS CONTINUE IN SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS, SOME LEGAL GUARANTEES ARE SUSPENDED, AND THERE IS LITTLE EVIDENCE THAT THE GOA INTENDS TO CHANGE THE SITUATION IN THE NEAR FUTURE. NO ONE APPEARS TO BE PREPARED TO OPPOSE OR OPENLY CRITICIZE THE GOVT OVER THIS SITUATION, (SINCE THERE APPEAR TO BE NO ACCEPTABLE ALTERNATIVES TO THE VIDELA GOVT), BUT CONCERN IS GROWING.

4. SECOND CHANGE CAN BE DATED TO BEGINNING OF JULY WHEN LEFT-IST TERRORISTS KILLED FEDERAL POLICE CHIEF AND THEN BOMBED CENTRAL POLICE HEADQUARTERS LEAVING MANY DEAD AND INJURED. VICIOUS COUNTER-TERRORIST REACTION FROM SECURITY FORCES (ACTING CLANDESTINELY), INCLUDING KILLING OF SEVERAL PRIESTS AND DUMPING OF SLAUGHTERED BODIES ALL OVER BUENOS AIRES, SHOCKED MANY ARGENTINES INTO NEW AWARENESS OF JUST HOW FAR THINGS HAVE GONE. SUBSEQUENT COUNTER-TERRORIST KIDNAPPINGS AND MURDERS, WHICH NOW CONSIDERABLY OVERSHADOW EFFORTS OF LEFTIST TERRORISTS, HAVE STRUCK HOME AMONG POLITICIANS AND CHURCHMEN. UNION CIVICA RADICAL (UCR), THE MODERATE CENTER OF ARGENTINE POLITICS AND THE LARGEST NON-PERONIST PARTY, HAS FOR EXAMPLE JUST ISSUED A STATEMENT SIGNED BY RICARDO BALBIN AND OTHER LEADERS, DEPLORING THE DISAPPEARANCE OF TWO OF ITS FORMER LEGISLATORS, SOLARI YRIGROYEN AND AMAYA. STATEMENT IS CAREFULLY WORDED SO AS NOT TO DIRECTLY SAY WHAT ALL KNOW--THAT THE TWO CONGRESSMEN WERE TAKEN OFFICIALLY OR UNOFFICIALLY BY THE SECURITY FORCES, BUT READERS ARE LEFT IN LITTLE DOUBT AS TO WHO THE UCR CONSIDERS IS RESPONSIBLE. UCR ALSO CONDEMNS THE "BARBARIC MASS IMMOLATION"

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OF 30 BODIES FOUND IN PILAR (BUENOS AIRES 5521).

5. EXPRESSIONS OF CONCERN VOICED BY CATHOLIC CHURCH WERE MODERATE FROM MARCH TO END OF JUNE. HOWEVER, MURDERS OF PRIESTS IN BUENOS AIRES AND IN LA RIOJA, AND SUSPECTED MURDER (IN SUPPOSED AUTOMOBILE ACCIDENT) OF BISHOP OF LA RIOJA HAS BROUGHT CHURCH CONSIDERABLE DISTANCE ALONG PATH TOWARD OPEN PROTEST AND ACCUSATION AGAINST GOA. CHURCH KNOWS THAT ATROCITIES WERE WORK OF SECURITY

FORCES, AND IT WILL TAKE LITTLE MORE TO PUSH CHURCH INTO CONFRONTATION WITH GOA. PAPAL NUNCIO IS KNOWN TO HAVE PROTESTED STRONGLY.

6. AS EXAMPLE OF CONCERN FROM OTHER SOURCES, PRIVATE "HUMAN RIGHTS ASSEMBLY," COMPRISING FIGURES FROM CATHOLIC CHURCH AND LIBERAL POLITICAL (UCR LEFT AND SOCIALISTS) GROUPS FORMED LAST DECEMBER, ISSUED STATEMENT THIS WEEK IN SUPPORT OF PREVIOUS CHURCH EFFORTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS, WANING THAT EVENTS HAVE SHOWN THAT EXPRESSIONS OF CONERN ARE NOT ENOUGH.

7. THIRD DEVELOPMENT DIRECTLY RELATED TO SECOND, ABOVE, IS INCREASING FEAR. IT IS BECOMING EVIDENT TO ARGENTINES THAT IT IS NOT ONLY THE TERRORIST OR REAL SUBVERSIVE WHO IS IN DANGER FROM THE COUNTER-TERRORISM, BUT ANYONE, EVEN PRIESTS, WHO IS CONSIDERED BY THE VERY BROAD STANDARDS OF THE COUNTER-TERRORISTS TO BE A THREAT. LIBERALS AND MODERATES ARE BEGINNING TO REALIZE THAT THEY, THEIR FAMILIES, COLLEAGUES AND FRIENDS

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BUENOS AIRES 5672

ARE NOT EXEMPT.

8. FINALLY, MASS MURDER OF 30 YOUNG PEOPLE FOUND IN PILAR, AND POSSIBLY ANOTHER 16 OR 17 FOUND IN ANOTHER LOCATION, IS GENERALLY ATTRIBUTED TO POLICE, AND HAS LIFTED LEVEL OF VIOLENCE IN PUBLIC EYES TO A NEW DIMENSIONM EVEN THOSE ARGENTINES WHO DISMISS WITH UNCORNCERN THE WHOLE HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEM ARE NOW RECOGNIZING THAT SHEER NUMBERS INVOLVED IN LATEST ATROCITY, AND ITS BLATENNESS, HAVE SHOCKED BOTH DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL

OPINION INTO NEW AWARENESS OF PROBLEM IN ARGENTINA. THERE ARE REPORTS THAT PRESIDENT VIDELA WAS STUNNED AND OUTRAGED BY PILAR MASSACRE, ALTHOUGH IT IS NOT CLEAR WHETHER FROM A CONCERN WITH HUMAN RIGHTS OR OVER LACK OF DISCRETION OF POLICE. WE HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT VIDELA KNOWS WHO IS RESPONSIBLE, AND INTENDS TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT (BUENOS AIRES 5521). THERE ARE UNCONFIRMED REPORTS AUGUST 27 THAT SOME 50 BUENOS AIRES PROVINCE POLICE WHO WERE ON DUTY IN PILAR AREA DURING NIGHT OF MASSACRE HAVE BEEN ARRESTED FOR INVESTIGATION. IT MAY BE THAT GOA LEADERS ARE FINALLY BEING FORCED INTO AT LEAST AN EFFORT TO SANCTION THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE KILLINGS.

9. WE DO NOT WISH TO SUGGEST THAT PUBLIC OPINION IS RISING IN OUTRAGE AGAINST THE GOA. MANY SECTORS OF ARGENTINE SOCIETY, ESPECIALLY IN THE UPPER AND MIDDLE CLASSES, HEARTILY APPROVE
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OF THE COUNTER-TERRORISM AND DO NOT HESITATE TO SAY SO EVEN TO AMERICAN DIPLOMATS. THE MODERATES OF THE CENTER AND LIBERAL POLITICAL AND CHURCH CIRCLES ARE MORE CONCERNED AND DISTURBED THAN THEY WERE AS RECENTLY AS JULY, BUT THEY GENERALLY SEE NO REALISTIC ALTERNATIVE TO THE PRESENT GOA AND THEY HOPE TO PERSUADE IT TO FOLLOW MODERATE POLICIES AND BRING THE COUNTER-TERRORISM UNDER CONTROL. THE GOA STILL HAS THE SUPPORT OF KEY SECTORS OF THE POPULATION AND TIME TO MAKE RECTIFICATIONS, BUT THE RUMBLINGS OF CONCERN AND PROTEST OVER ITS INTERNAL SECURITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES ARE GROWING.

10. GOA IS AWARE OF THIS REACTION AND IS AT LEAST CONCERNED ENOUGH OVER IT TO GIVE PUBLIC ASSURANCES OF ITS REJECTION OF COUNTER-TERRORISM, IN FORM OF PROPITIATORY RESPONSE TO HUMAN RIGHTS ASSEMBLY'S APPEAL FROM PRESIDENT VIDELA.
CHAPLIN

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